

Despite Forest Service attention and action, current outbreaks of mountain pine beetles continue to pose great threats to the BHNF. These outbreaks are the largest and most intense in recorded history, affecting an estimated 356,000 acres of ponderosa pine in the last 13 years. The spread of the epidemic is now accelerating at a dangerous pace, with beetle infested trees showing up in new areas throughout the forest. This epidemic has created the potential for catastrophic fires that threaten communities, forests, watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and local tourism industries. For instance, the Mt. Rushmore National Monument recently announced that, for the second year in a row, the traditional Independence Day fireworks celebration will not be held because of concern about wildfire danger caused by nearby trees that have been killed by mountain pine beetles.

- In August, Herseth Sandlin hosted USDA Deputy Under Secretary Jay Jensen, who is responsible for overseeing the U.S. Forest Service, on a tour of areas of the Black Hills that have been impacted by pine beetles and to meet with representatives from local communities and the forest resource industry.
- She also led a bipartisan group of members of Congress last month in writing to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, urging him to direct unobligated American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to expand the Forest Service's timber program by as much as \$150 million.
- In April, Herseth Sandlin joined with Rep. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming and a bipartisan group of their colleagues, requesting that the USDA develop of a comprehensive and proactive plan for address outbreaks of mountain pine beetles and identifies alternative sources of funding for that effort.
- In December 2009, Herseth Sandlin joined Rep. Kurt Schrader of Oregon in writing to President Obama, to request an increase in forest management resources, to sustain the health of both the Black Hills National Forest and rural communities that rely on forest jobs.
- In December 2009, Herseth Sandlin worked with a bipartisan group of western lawmakers to introduce the Healthy Forests Restoration Amendments Act, bipartisan, common-sense legislation that would address many of the threats that face the Black Hills National Forest, by strengthening the existing tools available to federal forest managers to bring the most diseased and fire prone forests back to health.
- Last year, Herseth Sandlin joined with Rep. Wally Herger of California to introduce the bipartisan Renewable Biomass Fairness Act, which will provide energy produced from renewable biomass an equal tax incentive as for wind and solar. She also worked with Rep. Kurt Schrader of Oregon to introduce the bipartisan Incentives to Increase Use of Renewable Biomass Act. This bill would establish a program at USDA to provide interest-free loans for converting existing equipment or installing new equipment to use renewable biomass for energy generation, heating, or cooling.

Recent Action:

In September of 2010, Herseth Sandlin called on USDA to use its authority to provide

immediate emergency funding to combat the mountain pine beetle infestation in the BHNF. Earlier this year, the agency provided emergency funding to fight the Asian longhorn beetle. Herseth Sandlin based her request for USDA's use of emergency authority to release funding to the BHNF on provisions in the Fiscal Year 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Bill that authorize the Secretary to provide funding to USDA agencies for the "arrest and eradication of contagious or infectious diseases or pests of animals, poultry, or plants." Calling the mountain pine beetle epidemic exactly the kind of emergency for which this provision was designed, Herseth Sandlin requested emergency resources to combat the mountain pine beetles in the BHNF. To view the letter [click here](#).

Herseth Sandlin also urged the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to eliminate bureaucracy and allow an emergency response under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). To view the letter [click here](#). Under emergency circumstances, NEPA regulations allow federal agencies and CEQ to agree upon expedited arrangements for compliance with NEPA in order to allow the agency to act aggressively "to control the immediate impact of the emergency." Herseth Sandlin urged the White House to consider the current mountain pine beetle as an emergency and to allow federal forest managers in the Black Hills the flexibility they need to respond effectively to the crisis.

Additionally, Herseth Sandlin called for increased Forest Service funding for the BHNF next year because it's clear that more funding is needed to respond effectively and aggressively to the ever growing mountain pine beetle epidemic in western South Dakota. To view the letter [click here](#).

Herseth Sandlin noted that following a bipartisan effort she helped lead in the House with Representative Lummis of Wyoming to prevent funding being removed from the region that includes South Dakota, the Forest Service allocated an additional \$2 million in 2010 to combat the pine beetles in South Dakota. Congress typically allocates money for the management of the National Forest System in categories of programs, which is then distributed at the discretion of the Forest Service within its regions. South Dakota is in the Rocky Mountain Region, also known as Region Two.

Tom Troxel of Executive Director of the BH Forest Resource Association said, "These measures urged in these letters would provide important new assistance to the Black Hills National Forest and greater flexibility in the planning process, so that the Forest Service can effectively respond to outbreaks of mountain pine beetle and prevent it from spreading further."